Glettler, Monika: Pittsburg-Wien-Budapest. Programm und Praxis der Nationalitätenpolitik bei der Auswanderung der ungarischen Slowaken nach Amerika um 1900.

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In America, immigration history is an American topic. The focus is on the new world, not the old. Historians study immigrants from the standpoint of their participation in American society and impact on American history. And there is much to study. Of crucial significance was that wave of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe around the turn of the twentieth century, who fueled the early industrialization of the United States and helped to raise the country into the ranks of the world's great powers.

But what of the lands they left behind? What kind of impact, if any, did those American immigrants have on their native societies? In contemporary times, one only need think of people in Ireland, Poland, and Israel to realize how crucial their American co-nationals are for them. Did similar conditions prevail in earlier decades? In contrast to Slovak historians („bourgeois" and Marxist alike), Monika Glettler looks at the Slovaks in America and argues that they had little influence on the nationality politics of the late Habsburg Empire.

During the generation before the First World War, almost a quarter of the entire Slovak population came to America. Their importance for the Slovak national movement has been emphasized by Slovak historians for decades. The sheer weight of the immigrants' numbers; the limited national consciousness of Slovaks in the old country; and the impact of the Pittsburgh agreement between Tomáš Masaryk and Slovak Americans in 1918 have encouraged the tendency to discover Slovak „national awakeners" among the immigrants in America.

Glettler shows that Slovak political activists attracted the intense interest of Habsburg diplomatic representatives in the United States. Their offical reports and the records of ensuing discussions in Vienna and Budapest constitute much of the source material for this book.

Glettler's extensive research in the Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, as well as in archives in Budapest and throughout Czechoslovakia, imparts indisputable authority to her work. The Austro-Hungarian consular reports probably provide the single most complete source of information about Slovak immigrants in America. No American agency had a similarly intense interest, certainly not in the political impact of Slovaks on the land they left behind. In the sheer weight of her evidence, Glettler's book is unexcelled.

But viewing Slovak immigrants through official lenses does nothing to improve their image. Glettler likens them to „Gastarbeiter", intent not on establishing themselves in America but on earning money and returning home as soon as possible. She emphasizes their love for the land itself in Slovakia and recounts a poignant story about two returning immigrants bidding against each other in a land auction to the point of paying twenty times the value of a parcel of land. She notes the illiteracy of many immigrants and claims that Slovaks showed less interest in

learning English than did Hungarians, for example. She writes that Slovaks were content with poorer living standards and more menial jobs, thereby frequently losing the respect of their fellow workers. Most of all, she says that they were apolitical. They focused on their personal economic welfare, not on long-term national politics.

Glettler does recognize and discuss the political activity among Slovaks in America. She focuses both on the organizations they founded and the publications they produced, and she provides convincing evidence of their limited impact around the turn of the century. They had only moderate appeal among the immigrant colony in America, and practically no resonance in Slovakia. She notes the divisions among Slovak fraternal organizations and their inability to agree on a common program. Not stopping there, she goes on to echo the diplomatic reports in questioning the professional capacities, and even the personal integrity, of the political activists. In that step, however, she risks becoming the captive of her source material, for the intense bias against „pan-Slav" tendencies clearly colored Austro-Hungarian diplomatic reports.

Glettler's view of life in America is hardly more positive than of the immigrants. Of the Slovak immigrants, she says there only two kinds: 1. those who had not yet accomplished anything; and 2. those who had tried and failed to enter American society. She says the American „ruling classes" looked down on the Slovaks, who were treated essentially as „white slaves" for whom the „Herrenschicht" was „unerreichbar". For her, „Heimatlosigkeit" gnawed at the immigrants, who were in the process of losing their old homeland without really gaining a new one. Moreover, they became infected by American materialism, with sights only on the „Wochenlohn" rather than longer-term values characteristic of an agrarian society.

To American ears, all this sounds like a collection of old-world superficial prejudices. It smacks of nostalgia for a simpler way of life, and it concentrates on the negative aspects of a modernizing society. Urbanization does uproot people, but they adapt and establish new homes in areas of greater opportunity. If they look to their weekly wages, at least they do have jobs and income. Glettler fantasizes a rigid class structure and underestimates the degree of social mobility in the United States. Such ideas are not central to her book, and they only weaken her thesis, which is both plausible and well-documented.

Glettler's main contribution to knowledge is summed up in her own words: „Ein quasi-selbstverständlicher Übergang zum Pittsburger Abkommen ist quellenmäßig weder aus ungarisch-slowakischem noch aus Wiener Material belegbar." Concentrating on the years just around 1900, she is on safe ground in this interpretation. But her source material fails her in the later, more crucial war years. Historians stressing the politicization of Slovak Americans have focused on the war itself, particularly its closing phases. By 1918 there were no Austrian consuls in America writing reports in which Glettler could do her research. Had Glettler paid more attention to the war years, she probably would have had to modify her emphasis on the political passivity of Slovak Americans.

The political importance of Slovaks in America lay primarily in their influence on American policy in 1918. Through the Pittsburgh agreement, they enabled

Masaryk to argue that he had Slovak support for the creation of a Czechoslovakia. In Washington, Americans Slovaks became regarded as representatives of their countrymen, whose voices could not be heard from Slovakia, given wartime censorship and repression. This argument made it easier for the American government to recognize Czechoslovak independence. (The chief motivation was the control that the Czech legionnaires exercised over Siberia, but the support of American Slovaks helped the American government rationalize its adoption of Masaryk's program.)

Glettler ignores those 1918 events and thereby misses the point as far as the political influence of American Slovaks is concerned. She is doubtlessly correct in arguing that American Slovaks had only a negligible political impact in Slovakia before the war. But there is general agreement concerning the limited national consciousness throughout Slovakia as of 1918. Clearly, no one, including the Americans, had much impact in prewar days.

Concerning the founding of the Czechoslovak republic, Glettler writes: „Das slowakische Bauernvolk verhielt sich bei der tschechoslowakischen Machtergreifung ebenso passiv wie vorher der magyarischen Herrschaft gegenüber." She might have added that there were soon a number of Slovaks returning from America who supported and encouraged that new political identity among their countrymen in Czechoslovakia. Slovaks were never again so passive.

At least as controversial is Glettler's view that Hungarian nationalist policies were „weniger konsequent und energisch" than generally thought. Her own evidence reflects the vehement nationalizing impulses in Budapest. The repeated attempts to enlist the Catholic church to resist „pan-Slav" agitation in Slovakia and in America provide a fascinating sample. The nationalist program of Hungarian Ministerpräsident Kálmán Széll in 1902 is another example. Glettler does show that Hungarian authorities could have little impact among Slovaks in America. Their impotence in America, however, does not lead to the conclusion that they neglected their nationalization efforts within Slovakia.

Glettler's final sentence concludes that there was no simple causality between the nationality problem and the results of the First World War. She is probably right. The founding of nation-states where old multi-national empires had existed for centuries was more accidental than inevitable. But Glettler should not minimize the role of Budapest's nationalization efforts in the ultimate dissolution of the Hungarian state.

In appealing to the loyalty of Slovaks, Hungarian strength lay in emphasizing geography, history, and economics; proximity, tradition, and commerce all argued for Slovakia's remaining a part of Hungary. The only area where the Czechs had a clear advantage was in nationality, given their closer similarity with the Slovaks in language und culture. By embarking on a determined effort to create an Hungarian nation-state, Hungarian authorities shifted the focus to nationality and thereby risked the losses they ultimately suffered after 1918.

Glettler rightly emphasizes the economic motivations for Slovak immigration to America. The staggering numbers that came reflected a bleak life in Slovakia, which Glettler describes but from which she fails to draw conclusions. Why did so

many young Slovaks cross the ocean to seek their fortunes, even on a temporary basis? Why were schools and professional careers practically closed to Slovaks within Hungary? Why were there only meagre programs aiming at economic development and job creation in Slovakia?

Glettler's book is magnificently researched. Her emphasis on the apolitical nature of Slovak immigrants is convincing. She does describe Hungarian nationality policies that were patently shortsighted. Yet she avoids discussing the implications of those policies and fails to discern their ultimate results. The salient fact she glosses over is that those hundreds of thousands of Slovak immigrants ultimately contributed to the burgeoning strength of America — and to the impoverishment and dissolution of Hungary.

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